

## **Greens debate future without May at helm; Diverse cast of leadership candidates offer ideas to grow party in debate**

The Toronto Star

June 24, 2020 Wednesday

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**Section:** NEWS; Pg. A8

**Length:** 719 words

**Byline:** Alex Ballingall Toronto Star

**Dateline:** OTTAWA

### **Body**

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Eco-socialists and converted Liberals. Champions of fiscal conservatism and climate action.

A man in a top hat.

This is what the end of the Elizabeth May era looks like for the Green Party of Canada - and what, depending on who succeeds her, its future might hold. On Tuesday, the diverse cast of 10 candidates appeared by video for the first official debate in the leadership race to replace May, the most successful figurehead in the party's history who led the Greens for more than 13 years.

Split into two groups for separate discussions on the same themes, the twin debates hosted by TVO were mostly cordial, with the potential for direct clashes diminished by time constraints and the realities of campaigning in the time of COVID-19. Instead of sharing a stage, the candidates shared screens and debated by video from all corners of the country.

They offered similar positions on many topics. None support the construction of new pipelines in Canada. There was widespread agreement on the need to change the federal electoral system, a perennial demand for a party that wins few seats despite the proportion of votes it receives. And many called for similar policies, including a guaranteed basic income for Canadians in a post-pandemic economy.

But the discussions still illuminated differences between the candidates and where each hopes to steer the party if they win the contest.

During the first debate, former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Glen Murray clashed with Toronto lawyer Annamie Paul over which form of carbon pricing can best drive down greenhouse-gas emissions. Murray, who was Ontario's environment minister when the now-shelved cap-and-trade system was implemented, argued such a system is better because it comes with a hard limit on emissions. He called the federal carbon tax "a joke" for being too lax.

Paul countered that many economists see a tax on emissions as more efficient. "Glen, I think we've moved on a bit from cap-and-trade," she said.

Candidates also outlined different visions for how the party can grow from the three seats it won under May's leadership in the 2019 federal election - it's best result ever. Andrew West, a lawyer from Ottawa who describes himself as a political moderate, said the Greens should position themselves as centrists who can appeal to progressive voters with their social policies and environmental credentials, while also nabbing support from fiscal Conservatives who don't believe that party is serious about climate change.

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"If we shift the party towards the left, which a lot of ... candidates want to do, then we're going to have more candidates fighting for a smaller piece of the pie," said West.

Other candidates said they want the Greens to embody progressive policies. Paul called for free tuition and universal pharmacare. Meryam Haddad and Dimitri Lascaris - Montrealers who say they are socialists - argued the Greens can become the natural home for left-leaning voters through clearer communication and an endorsement of huge spending programs to spur growth and shift to a cleaner economy.

"The people who are the true moderates in this race are those who are calling upon this country and this party to take the steps necessary to deal with a fundamentally flawed economic system that is leading us down the path of climate crisis," said Lascaris.

The sharpest charge of the debates came during a discussion of racism and police. The candidates generally agreed Canada should shift spending from law enforcement to social and mental health services. Dylan Perceval-Maxwell, a six-time election candidate who sported a black top hat for Tuesday's debate, added he would require police officers to give \$20 to every racialized person they stop on the street.

Haddad called the suggestion "super racist" and said that "as a person of colour, I find it very, very offensive ... What would be the next step? If the person gets beaten up we give them \$50?"

Perceval-Maxwell responded that he wants to reduce systemic racism, but did not have time to explain further because the debate was over.

Each candidate has cleared the first entry hurdle by paying an initial \$10,000 fee to get in the race.

More than 24,000 Green party members are eligible to vote by mail or online between Sept. 26 and Oct. 3. The new leader is set to be named Oct. 4.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Document-Type:** COLUMN

**Publication-Type:** NEWSPAPER

**Subject:** POLITICAL & SOCIAL IDEOLOGIES (90%); POLITICAL PARTIES (90%); POLITICS (90%); SOCIALISM (90%); CONSERVATISM (89%); ELECTIONS (89%); ELECTIONS & POLITICS (89%); EMISSIONS (88%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (79%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); CENTRISM (78%); CLIMATE ACTION (78%); CLIMATE CHANGE (78%); VOTERS & VOTING (78%); EPIDEMICS (74%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (73%); UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME (73%); AGREEMENTS (72%); ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENTS (72%); ECONOMY & ECONOMIC INDICATORS (70%); CABINET OFFICES (69%); CARBON TAX (69%); COVID CORONAVIRUS (69%); COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS (69%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (69%); INFECTIOUS DISEASE (69%); ELECTION REFORM (67%); ECONOMICS (65%); LAWYERS (65%); TAXES & TAXATION (65%); GREENHOUSE GASES (63%)

**Industry:** EMISSIONS (88%); PIPELINE TRANSPORTATION (72%); CARBON TAX (69%); LAWYERS (65%)

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**Geographic:** TORONTO, ON, CANADA (79%); OTTAWA, ON, CANADA (74%); ONTARIO, CANADA (89%); CANADA (93%)

**Load-Date:** June 24, 2020

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